

'In Thy Courts'

Louis Vignat, S.J.

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‘IN THY COURTS’

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'IN THY COURTS'

(La Vocation a la Vie Religieuse)

TRANSLATED FROM
THE FRENCH OF
LOUIS VIGNAT, S.J.
"

BY
MATTHEW L. FORTIER, S.J.
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ANALYSIS OF CONTENTS.

(REPRODUCED FROM "*Les Études.*")

I. "Jesus Christ and the Religious Life."
—Our Lord opposes as an antidote to the threefold concupiscence of the world the three substantial vows of religion. These vows constitute a state of life: the religious life. This state has Jesus Christ for author, for having established it by His example and teaching, He made it possible to our weakness by the shedding of His blood on Calvary.

II. "The Call of Jesus Christ."—Most frequently, vocation is the ordinary action of the Holy Ghost that urges us to embrace the good and moves us even to the greater good. This supernatural movement of grace is now more, now less, lively; now more, now less, persistent. It must be controlled by external authority. The Holy Ghost prompts and excites; the Church approves and puts into execution. It is the con-

fessor who in this acts in the name of the Church, but he must be a prudent and experienced confessor.

III. "How the Divine Call is Made Manifest."—The first reason for becoming a religious is to secure one's salvation at any cost. Next, the love of God urges us to imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. Sometimes the desire to make the best use of one's life and to spend it in the service of righteousness manifests the divine call. The emptiness of human joys and the trials and difficulties of life are also means which divine goodness makes use of. Finally, good example and the grace of a good retreat often determine vocations.

IV. "The Struggle for a Vocation."—To correspond with God's call difficulties arising from repugnance, anxieties, doubts, and unreasonable apprehensions must be overcome. Barriers, put in the way by even Christian families, must be broken down. The heart, as well as the mind, must make its defense—the latter by freeing itself from sophisms, always refuted, but forever spring-

ing up again; the former by severing the cords of too natural a tenderness.

In these short pages it was not the author's intention to dispense theologians from reading the treatment of this question by such authors as Saint Thomas, Suarez, Platus, Lessius, and Saint Alphonsus Liguori; but in thus summarizing the teaching of the masters he has done great service to the good of those souls who are seeking their own vocation, and who will therefore read these counsels with much profit.

L. G.

PREFATORY NOTE

“If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor and come follow me,”¹ the special message of Eternal Wisdom to a soul of predilection—is the Gospel truth of which “In Thy Courts” would give us an exposé.

It is to point out in Revelation a Scriptural warrant for the special call, to give some definite notion of its nature, to describe some of the many forms of its manifestation to the individual soul—to speak a word of warning to the unwary amidst the difficulties of the struggle in faithfully following the Savior’s invitation to a religious life voiced in love ineffable, that Father Vignat, a scholarly priest of the Society of Jesus, has written this booklet. It is especially timely since it appears as a guiding ray of light in the dark, troublesome storm now hovering over and disturbing dear old France, when Satan’s shafts have been directed against the Church

¹ St. Matthew xix. 17.

and with special violence against her lovely Child—the Religious. Never was such a booklet more useful than now to help with its mite in directing the many vocations which on every hand manifest themselves in France—the Mother of Missionaries—as well as in other countries, a striking proof that “the Church persecuted is the Church triumphant.”

In these fruitful and immense gardens of the Church—our own dear America—the spirit of religion has taken firm root and put forth a vigorous growth in the many phases of Catholic and religious life. Hence, I welcome this little work in its English version and new title “In Thy Courts,” the work of an American Jesuit teaching in the Archdiocese. While I willingly bless his efforts, I gladly and earnestly commend this book to the Catholic and non-Catholic public, and especially to the youth of our country who are desirous of knowing and of studying, and may be of heeding, the Master’s Call.

J. CARD. GIBBONS.

BALTIMORE, Md., May 1, 1907.

APOSTOLIC DELEGATION,
United States of America.

1811 Biltmore Street,
Washington, D. C.,
April the 19th, 1907.

Reverend and dear Sir:—

“IN THY COURTS,” a translation of Father Vignat’s little gem on the call of Christ to a life in Religion, already approved by your Superiors, cannot fail to be of great service to English-speaking youths who in their doubts and aspirations are seeking light and counsel in that most important subject of Vocation.

Its treatment of the sources of the religious life in revelation, the nature and manifestation of a call to such a life, and the struggle of the soul in yielding obedience to the voice of the Lord is particularly timely and helpful in these practical days, when men give so sparingly to God and Religion.

Hence, whilst I praise your zeal and bless

your efforts, I earnestly recommend “In Thy Courts” to all those who wish to form an accurate idea of Vocation to Religion, and especially to those youths whose hearts are receiving the first impression of that calm, sweet Voice of the Master.

Praying God to shower down upon you
His choicest graces, I remain

Most faithfully yours in Xt,

D. FALCONIO,
Apostolic Delegate.

REVEREND MATTHEW L. FORTIER, S. J.

“IN THY COURTS”

Is a short, solid, comprehensive study of “The Call of Christ to a Life in Religion” vouchsafed by the Master to His chosen followers in Evangelical perfection, translated from the French of Louis Vignat, priest of the Society of Jesus, and Rector of the French Theologate, Hastings, England, by Matthew L. Fortier, priest of the same Society.

WOODSTOCK, 1907.

The translator wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness and to express his cordial thanks for encouragement, help, and revision of manuscript to

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“IN THY COURTS”

CHAPTER I.

JESUS CHRIST AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Only a very superficial idea of the religious life would be formed by any inquirer who should not at the outset fix his attention upon the mystery of the Incarnation itself and its incalculable consequences. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”¹

This is a fact of immense importance. It is none other than Eternal Wisdom humbling Himself even to the lowliness of human nature to teach men with His own divine lips. It is the life of God made man exhibiting from the Crib to Calvary an ideal of holiness which the most ambitious of moral greatness may strive after, though he can never fully attain its perfection.

¹ St. John, I-14.

More than this; by His death on the cross Jesus, at the price of His own blood, raises us to a kind of equality with Himself. In the eyes of God, Christians in the state of grace are no longer servants, but friends,¹ brothers of Jesus Christ,² adopted sons of God,³ temples of the Holy Ghost,⁴ partakers in the divine nature.⁵ This gift, like a divine seed,⁶ transforms our nature into a

¹ “I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.” St. John, XV-15.

² “And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.” St. Matt., XII, 49-50.

“Go to my brethren, and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.” St. John, XX-17.

³ “Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God.” I Ep. St. John, III-1.

⁴ “Know you not, that you are the temple of God?” I Ep. Cor. III-16. “Or know you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost.” I Ep. Cor., VI-19.

⁵ “By whom (Jesus Christ) he (God) hath given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature.” II Ep. of St. Peter, I-4.

⁶ “Whosoever is born of God, committeth not sin: for His seed abideth in him.” I Ep. of St. John, III-9.

new nature,¹ intended to grow continually, under the breath of grace and the influence of the sacraments, even to the full bloom of eternal happiness. In the mystery of the Incarnation, it is indeed the divine nature that is poured out upon the world. The life of our Lord, His teaching, and His gifts raise man above all that human reason could have conceived. Since God has loved us so much, and enriched us with so many gifts, but little elevation of mind and nobility of heart is required to put us out of conceit with that mere honest mean, or even balance between opposite extremes on which the sages of old used to plume themselves.

Jesus calls on all His disciples—that is, on all Christians—to be perfect.²

Now, Christian perfection is charity. Jesus himself has said that in the love of God and of our neighbor are contained the whole law and the prophets.³ The more

¹“If then any be in Christ a new creature, the old things are passed away, behold all things are made new.” II Ep. Cor., V-17.

²St. Matt., V-48.

³St. Matt., XXII-40.

one loves God, the more does one advance toward perfection.

Charity, and consequently perfection, admit of degrees. The first, which is necessary for salvation, is the keeping of the Commandments. “If you love me, keep my commandments;”¹ and this is a love which may at times require very much of the Christian. He must be ready to sacrifice all, even life, rather than offend God mortally by a grievous transgression of a single commandment. But charity can rise higher. True love of God does not rest satisfied with merely obeying His commands; it seeks in every way to fulfil His good pleasure; it forgets its own interests to be taken up with those of Jesus Christ alone; it devotes its life to His service—ready to spend and lose it for His honor and for His glory, for “greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”²

The love of God is, then, the very ideal of perfection and of Christian life. Now, is this love, even in its lowest degree, the ob-

¹ St. John, XIV-15.

² St. John, XV-13.

servance of the Commandments, easily kept ever alive without even casual failure? Above all, is it easy to carry this love to the self-renunciation preached by Jesus Christ? Alas! "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak."¹

God is not perceived by our senses. Though intimately and mysteriously present to each of us, He does not force Himself upon our notice. How quick we are to forget Him! Things of the senses, on the other hand, unceasingly present themselves to entice the heart, to attract and captivate it by a thousand cords of desire and enjoyment. How love God with one's whole heart when it is entirely taken up with the things of earth? The divine sower passes and casts the seed of his love upon good ground, which seems indeed well prepared; but the cares of life and riches, like thorns, grow up and choke the good grain.² "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also,"³ saith Jesus. If the heart is given up

¹ St. Matt., XXVI-41.

² St. Luke, VIII-7-11.

³ St. Matt., VI-21.

to riches, to luxury, to comfort, it cannot be devoted to God, for, continues our Lord, “No man can serve two masters: * * * God and mammon.”¹ The good things of this world are the first hindrance to the love of God.

A second obstacle we bear within ourselves—an inclination, namely, to pleasure and enjoyment of the senses. There are pleasures that God blesses in lawful wedlock; yet even these divide the affections. “He that is with a wife,” says Saint Paul, in his frank and unstudied speech, “is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife: and he is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband.”²

If this be true of the lawful pleasures, what must be said of such as are not lawful? The animal nature which we bear within us,

¹ St. Matt., VI-24.

² I Ep. to Cor., VII-33-34.

if we but slacken the reins or treat it with too much delicacy, will rebel and claim its prey. The more we yield to it, the more does it demand. Thus it is that so many Christians, fed for years with the Eucharistic Bread, like the prodigal son, wander away to squander, far removed from God, the best substance of their youth.

A last obstacle to the love of God, and perhaps the greatest, because it emanates from a higher and more immaterial source, is pride. Man so easily lends an attentive ear to the old temptation of the Earthly Paradise: "You shall be as Gods."¹ He wishes to be his own rule of conduct, to depend upon the lights of his own unaided reason, to do only his own will and make everything yield to its desires. He thus unavoidably comes into collision with the unbending law of God, and his charity, if it be not altogether destroyed, is always weakened.

Jesus Christ knew all this. And in His divine wisdom He had calculated the extent of the influence of these three obstacles.

¹ Gen., III-5.

Thus to all who aspire to Christian perfection—that is to say, to persevere and to advance in the love of God—He holds out and counsels, without, however, imposing it upon them, a means as efficacious as it is radical.

Have you set your heart upon higher things; is it your ambition to love God, as He deserves to be loved? Ah then! soul of my choice, follow me; like me, embrace a life of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience. Poverty will free you from the dangers of riches; chastity will shield you from the deceptive and wayward attacks of the senses; obedience will shelter you from the peril of pride. And, mark it well, it is not some few isolated acts, performed, as it were, in passing, that our Lord Jesus Christ counsels. He desires an irrevocable engagement in a permanent state of life. “No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”¹ “If thou wilt be perfect,” He says to the young man, “go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou

¹ St. Luke, IX-62.

shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.”¹

There is clearly no question of ever taking back again goods once sold or given away. To the disciples He proposes a chastity such as, from the very terms He uses, can admit of no revocation.² If He invites us to follow Him along the path of obedience, He is careful to let us know that, before us, He has been obedient unto death.³ These are the reasons why the practice of the Evangelical Counsels implies a lasting engagement. There can be no religious life, such as Jesus Christ conceived it, without abandonment of self to God. The vows must necessarily come in to transform the best of desires and the most excellent of resolves into a permanent state of life.

Such facts and reflections lead clearly to the conclusion that the roots of religious life lie deep in the Gospel itself. It springs

¹ St. Matt., XIX-21.

² St. Matt., XIX-12.

³ Ep. to Phil., II-8. “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.”

from the Gospel as one of the choicest fruits of the teachings of Christ.¹

Let religious life disappear and the Church would remain mutilated and uncrowned. It would no longer accomplish its full mission, since it would cease to teach mankind to keep and practice whatever Christ has taught.

This is why Catholic doctors think that religious life, in all its essentials, will endure as long as the Church itself. Like the Church, though in a different sense, it has Christ for its founder. He founded it by His teaching and by His example.

He has established the religious life in yet another way—by the merits of His precious blood. If in the days of our Lord the wise men of the world, then living, had heard Him proclaim the poor blessed, counsel abandonment of all possessions; if to disciples who could not even understand the

¹“The religious orders, as everyone knows, take their origin and heir motive of existence from those sublime counsels of the Gospel, which our divine Redeemer addressed, for the whole course of ages, to those who wish to reach Christian perfection.” (Letter of Leo XIII to Cardinal Richard, December 23, 1900.)

possibility of marriage without divorce, they had heard Jesus speak the praises of chastity and of a life more angelic than human; if they had been present at exhortations to absolute self-renunciation and hatred of self, surely these wise and prudent men would have smiled, and would have looked upon such a life as a chimera. But Jesus was God. He sketched the plan of a perfect life, and then He shed His blood, and from that divine blood have sprung up thousands of men and women devoted to voluntary poverty, virginity, and obedience. All the lights that have guided the founders of orders, all the graces which have urged men and women to enter monasteries and religious houses, all the helps that secure their perseverance, were merited for them on Calvary. It is not one of their least comforts, nor one of their least effectual spurs, for religious to be able to say to themselves that the call which they have heard, that the graces which sustain them, that the very life they lead, have come forth from the heart of Jesus upon the cross.

CHAPTER II.

THE CALL OF JESUS CHRIST.

But how does Jesus Christ call men to the religious life? With what voice does He reach the ear? What signs does He give of His invitation and of His desires?

Some calls are indeed miraculous. Such, for example, is that of Saint Stanislaus receiving the Child Jesus in his arms, from the very hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and hearing the Queen of Heaven bidding him enter the Society of Jesus.

But facts and revelations like these are very rare indeed. Only a few are recorded in the lives of the greatest saints. God does not govern the world of souls by miracle, but by the very effectual and yet very ordinary action of the Holy Ghost.

This action of the Holy Ghost is not a mystic theory, more or less open to question; it is a genuine Catholic dogma. That the devil tempts us, no Christian can deny.

Shall not God also exert an influence upon us? Surely He does influence us; but in a way diametrically opposed to that of Satan. And how does Satan proceed? Can he give us new ideas, or make us form new images without any preexisting element? I do not think so. He tempts us first by rousing in our imagination, through association of ideas, representations the outlines of which are already long since stored up in our memories. And this is precisely the reason why sensual passages in books, immoral spectacles, indecent pictures, are so very dangerous. They furnish the devil with weapons.

God, on the other hand, urges us to well-doing in a more exalted manner, not by acting on our imagination and through it on our passions, but on our intellect and our will. To do this He makes use of the truths of faith which we already possess; He lights them up, as it were, before the eyes of our soul, and He gives to the will a keener relish of them and a more ardent enthusiasm in their pursuit. Some truth of faith, for instance, the love that God bears us, which we well

knew long since, becomes through the action of the Holy Ghost within our souls more luminous. Heretofore it had left us cold and unmoved; but now we are deeply touched by its consideration. By this stronger and more penetrating light, under the action of God's influence, we draw practical conclusions which we never thought of before, and we feel within ourselves at last courage to be *logical*. The Holy Ghost tells us nothing we did not know before; but He shows us what we know already under a light altogether new.

The often repeated incident in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi is well known. The saint on hearing read from the Gospel a passage relating to poverty, straightway resolved to despoil himself of all his goods. Many have read that same Gospel page without being thus moved. Only a special light of the Holy Ghost could impel a man to the perfect and immediate execution of such a purpose. Who is there among us that does not know the “*Quid prodest*”—the Scriptural words: “What doth it profit a man, if he

gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"¹ that made Francis Xavier a saint? Or who is ignorant of the question: 'Quid hoc ad æternitatem?'—"Of what use is this for eternity?"² This became the guiding maxim of Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga. These words remain in our hearts almost without response, because the Holy Ghost is silent in them.

This truth, that admirable book, "The Following of Christ," beautifully expresses when speaking of the prophets and the other authors of Holy Scripture: "They may indeed sound forth words, but they do not add to them the spirit. They speak well, but, if Thou be silent, they do not set the heart on fire. They proclaim the commandments, but Thou enablest us to fulfil them. They show the way, but Thou givest strength to walk in it. Their work is only external, but Thou instructest and enlightenest the heart. They water from out, but Thou givest the increase."³

¹ St. Matt., XVI-26. ² Maxim of Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga.

³ "Following of Christ," Book III-2.

Those who by pious reading feed their souls with supernatural truths, and keep set hours of prayer and of recollection, know by experience this action of God's grace upon the soul; whilst many are unacquainted with it because their minds are so filled with worldly thoughts and earthly cares that the Holy Ghost, the Dove of the Ark, finds in their souls no place whereon to rest.

Vocation is nothing more than that light and that divine strength which we have just described, when directed entirely toward one special end—the religious life. Some day or other after hearing a sermon, after reading a pious book, or in the calm of prayer, in a moment of trial, or even after the enjoyment of some pleasure the emptiness of which God has caused a chosen soul to realize, the Holy Ghost will suggest to it a life in religion, and will urge that soul to embrace such a life from motives of faith.

One single lively movement of grace may be enough; but if that movement, even though

weak, is felt for a considerable length of time, and frequently renewed, there is undoubtedly a vocation.

It is indeed a supernatural movement, and hence comes from God. Nature does not incline a youth to a life of renunciation; it rather entices him to pleasure. Nature does, indeed, attract certain high-minded souls to glorious, noble, brilliant deeds; but it does not inspire them with humility, with self-abandonment, with detachment from beloved objects and persons, nor with the subjection of self to a fixed rule of life. God alone, we repeat, by means of the truths of faith awakes such desires in the soul.

Worldlings must attribute such desires to folly, or else recognize in them the finger of God. Even Alfred de Musset wrote with exquisite irony of "That unconquerable instinct which prompts a child of ten to conceive and keep the resolution of putting on a woollen garb, of seeking out the poor and the suffering, and of thus spending her whole life; many an indifferentist, or philosopher, will die before any of them can find the ex-

planation of such a fancy, but the fancy really exists.”¹

What the philosophers do not explain, because they will not have recourse to the supernatural, Christians understand without difficulty; it is light divine, the call of the Savior—*vocation*. Moreover, vocation, like every inspiration of the Holy Ghost, must have the safeguard of some external control. It is indeed one of the laws of supernatural Providence that all the good, which God urges us to do, should be subject to those whom the Church by her divine authority has appointed to lead us along the way of salvation. A very intense interior life and the most firm external authority thus are found united in the bosom of the Church. The Holy Ghost prompts generous undertakings; the Church or her representatives examine and approve them, after having, in case of need, eliminated from them the errors, the exaggerations, and the illusions which through imagination or self-love may have crept into such undertakings. It is

¹“Pierre et Camille,” III.

thus that at every period of Christianity have originated great works, pious enterprises, reforms, and foundations of religious orders. And in them one and all we may always observe a twofold element. The Holy Ghost suggests them by His interior action upon the soul, but He wishes them to be carried into effect under the guiding authority of His Church.

In the ordinary guidance of souls it is to their confessors the Church commits the charge of watching over the movements of grace. It is to the confessor, then, that he whom God calls ought to open his mind and from him seek advice. But in so serious and delicate a matter it is important that the choice of a director be made with the utmost care. Not all priests have the same degree of prudence and the knowledge of souls so necessary in such a matter. Even in religious orders the government of novices is not intrusted to any and every religious, but to men of solid virtue and of great discernment, not only because they have to form them to religious life, but especially because

it rests with them to decide on last appeal, as it were, upon the genuineness of vocations.

An ideal director in the matter of vocation would be a priest guiding himself and others by the light of supernatural views alone, well instructed in the sacred sciences, and above all in the knowledge of God's ways, of great experience in the direction of souls, free from prejudice against the religious life, and, moreover, well acquainted with its difficulties alike and its helps—in a word, no one can know it better than he who leads that life himself.

The part of the confessor is to assist the action of grace without forestalling it, to dispel illusions, to banish false enthusiasm, as well as to remove prejudices, to light the way, to counsel prayer, the frequent reception of the sacraments, and the living of a life worthy of the graces received. But never should he put his own views in the place of God's; he does not *make decisions*: he *approves* of them; he does not give a vocation: he recognizes it and declares its existence.

Vocations manifest themselves under very different forms. God does not conduct all souls by the same path. To some He vouchsafes a light so strong that doubt is impossible. Young people have been seen almost to shed tears of anger at feeling themselves called. They did not want the religious life. It was repugnant to every tendency of their nature. But deep down in their inmost souls was heard a call so clear that there was no stifling it. Calls so decisive are indeed rare. They occur, for the most part, only in the case of very gifted and generous natures, which, as the result of a combination of ideas and tastes, and even at times in consequence of past faults, find themselves very far removed from religious life. Our Lord seems to desire them in spite of everything. He pursues them until they surrender to Him. These are in miniature, short of the miraculous, vocations after the manner of Saint Paul's. Our Lord could say to them as to His future apostle: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad."¹

¹ Acts IX-5.

Such vocations do not admit of half measures. Souls of this stamp will answer to the call and will become holy. If they were to show themselves inflexible and refuse the graces offered them with so much insistence, they would rush quickly on to sad extremes, and their eternal salvation would thereby be in great peril.

In clear distinction from this urgent call, there is another resembling an invitation, the acceptance of which is not insisted upon but left entirely to the attention and choice of the soul invited. Our Lord suggests the vocation; He does not seem to wish to *enjoin* it upon the soul as a bounden duty. “If thou wilt,”¹ He says. He gives the call, but He does not urge it. This kind of vocation is often found in the case of good souls who have already received very many graces. Such, indeed, is the story of the rich young man of the Gospel:² “And behold one (a young man) came and said to him: ‘Good

¹ St. Matt., XIX-17.

² St. Matt., XIX. St. Mark, X-21. Conf. A. J. Maas, “Life of Christ,” page 360.

master, what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?' And Jesus said to him: 'Why callest thou me good? One is good, God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' And he said to him: 'Which (commandments)?' And Jesus said: 'Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; honor thy father and thy mother; and, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' The young man, answering, saith to him: 'All these (commandments) have I kept from my youth, what is yet wanting to me?' And Jesus looking on him, loved him, and said to him: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.' And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad: for he had great possessions."

Every day this scene is renewed in the secrecy of some youthful heart.

Take, for instance, a youth of excellent nature, of virtuous disposition; he has pre-

served his purity, thanks to the watchful care of a Christian home. Placed at a Catholic college, he has experienced scarcely any hardship. He is a prudent and model student and a frequent communicant. It would cost him little effort to follow a vocation, if one were given him. Our Lord, who loves virgin hearts, invites him gently: “If thou wilt.”¹ The young man hesitates. He would have more light, a call more pronounced, more imperious. Jesus will give him nothing more. Is not this discretionary invitation, which he may accept or reject as seems good to him, in itself an immense grace? Everything will depend upon his generosity. Many youths in like cases accept the call; they become excellent religious, who cheerfully bear the yoke of the Lord in joy and peace. Many, on the other hand, reject the proffered vocation and generally become very indifferent Christians, for the gift of God is not refused with impunity.

Between the vocations of mere invitation and vocations so urgent and pronounced as

¹ St. Matt., XIX-17.

almost to border on the miraculous there are various degrees.

God is Master; He does as He pleases in His dealings with souls. The lights which he vouchsafes, the movements which He arouses, are very different, very varied in form and intensity; now they present themselves unawares, and strike home where they were least expected; again they work their way into the soul gently by an interior action of grace, scarcely perceptible, which little by little matures a vocation, as the sun ripens beautiful fruit. Some calls are clearly heard from the days of childhood, and take definite form at the first meeting between the soul and our Lord in holy communion. Other calls come later—at the completion, for instance, of one's studies, when it becomes necessary to fix upon a definite plan of life. There are vocations at the ninth and even at the eleventh hour. All these vocations, however, have this in common, namely, that they take expression in thoughts and truths of faith; it is characteristic of the Holy Ghost to act upon souls by means of super-

natural motives. Consequently all these calls have the nature of reason; not of that purely human reason which does not rise above worldly interests, but of that exalted reason which constitutes Christian wisdom.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE DIVINE CALL IS MADE MANIFEST.

In the divine call one motive often predominates, but seldom stands alone. Moreover, in describing some of the supernatural reasons which, under the action of divine grace, constitute a vocation to religious life, it is far from my purpose to establish set classes or categories of vocations. A psychological analysis alone can separate from each other and single out the elements of thought which in man's conscience combine to influence the will.

The first reason for becoming a religious often presents itself as a fixed resolve to make sure of one's salvation at any cost. For a young man whom God inspires to look the future in the face, this is indeed a serious question: Shall I save my soul? Day-dreams in youth are bright, but can they all be so realized as not to come to an end at the

great awakening in eternity? And in what an eternity? Oh, terrible dilemma! Death generally depends upon previous life. I do, indeed, wish to live as a good Christian. Yet others have, like me, formed the same purpose. Then, little by little, saturated by the worldly, indifferent, perhaps irreligious atmosphere surrounding them, they grew weak and quite lost their moral vigor. Temptations assailed them and found them without strength, and they entered at last upon the broad road. Am I stronger than they? Have I not in more than one encounter already experienced my own weakness? How I allow myself to be quite overcome and, as it were, to be carried away by pleasure! How I yield myself a captive to the influence of my environment! These my half-hearted resolutions of courage and virtue are in great need of a strong support, and my weakness is in want of an effective safeguard. But one can save his soul in the world, it is objected. That is very true, but shall I? Is it not better to make sure of my eternal destiny?

This reason would be enough. It has given rise to some very solid vocations. Does it not bear the mark of supernatural prudence? Did not Jesus Christ our Lord say: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"¹ After a thousand years spent in hell, what would a damned soul think of the life of pleasure which he had enjoyed on earth? After a thousand years spent in the joys of Heaven, would a religious deem the sacrifices he had to make worth a thought?

These grave reflections are generally at the bottom of every vocation; but they are not alone, and are often not even predominant. It is not fear that fills the ranks of religious orders; it is rather the love of God. What a pity it is to hear certain writers of fiction talk of disillusion, bitter misfortunes, ruined lives, the unhappy subjects of which come to hide their sorrow and regrets within the cloister! Our monasteries and convents are not filled with the world's wrecks, but with the fairest, the soundest, the most generous

¹St. Matt., XVI-26.

products of the earth. It is not a storm blast nor bitterness that drives so many souls to religious life; it is rather the gentle breeze of divine love.

The Holy Ghost makes His way peacefully into the hearts of men and enkindles in them a burning desire of belonging wholly to God, wholly to Jesus Christ our Lord, without let or hindrance, without division, and without end. That coarse and humble garb is preferred to every other because it is the livery of Jesus Christ. Those chains of obedience are cords of loving choice because they bind to the service of the divine Master, and because in bearing them one is sure of doing the holy will of God. That separation from the world is coveted because through it Jesus will be found and possessed with an undivided heart.

At times, under the influence of grace, to this longing for a complete, absolute abandonment of self to God is even added the ambition of great souls to tread very closely in the footsteps of the Savior. Jesus was poor; He was born in a stable; the members

of His body lay upon the straw of the crib; on His apostolic journeyings He had not a stone whereon to lay His head; at the foot of the cross the soldiers stripped Him of His garments; His very grave had to be an alms. By Himself embracing poverty Jesus made it lovable. Like Jesus then we too wish to be poor; like Him, we wish to attach our hearts to nothing earthly. He alone is our true treasure; we wish for no other.

Jesus was obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.¹ Following his lead, obedience becomes sweet and lovable.

Jesus, the son of the most pure and immaculate Virgin Mary, is purity itself; He is the well-beloved, who taketh His pleasure and "who feedeth among the lilies."² To remain among His followers no sacrifice is too dear; even the shadow of evil will be shunned with jealous care.

Sometimes the thoughts suggested by the Holy Spirit take another form; for instance, that of making the best use of life. It is too short, too precious, to be wasted; and as the

¹ Ep. to the Philip., II-8.

² Canticle of Canticles, II-16.

love of our neighbor in Christian charity is inseparable from, or, rather, identical with, the love of God, the desire of doing good to others, of being an apostle, springs up within the soul. Many a youth by a happy experience has been made to understand how true is the word of the Scripture: “It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive.”¹ In deeds of helpfulness, in teaching catechism, or in other works of benevolence, they have felt the first ardors of Christian zeal. God made them realize that true life consists in spending one’s self for others. The apostolate of the poor, of children, of the sick; the apostolate among the millions who are wandering far from God; the apostolate among heretics and schismatics; among unbelievers; among all those nations who are yet awaiting the full light of Christ’s Gospel, become a boundless field for their active charity. Isolated efforts are liable to be less fruitful, nor are, indeed, always free from danger. The religious life, on the other hand, with its solid formation, its organized bodies, its safe-

¹ Acts, XX-35.

guards for all times and situations, furnishes the apostle with a moral support which more than doubles his powers. Besides, God very often gives a vocation to the apostolate as one indissolubly united with the call to religious life.

Solicitude for one's eternal salvation, such love of God as inspires self-abandonment and imitation of Jesus Christ, and the desire of the apostolate presuppose a soul already arrived at the threshold of religious life. None the less, God often directs His call to souls that are indeed far removed from such a life. All their attention is perhaps fixed upon a bright future, all their attractions tend to the joys and ambitions of the world. How does the Holy Ghost lead such souls to the great and generous thoughts that prepare and dispose them for the decisive step? Often He inspires them with a most lively realization of the emptiness of human joys. In the still evening of a day during which all, indeed, seemed to pass in accordance with whim and pleasure, a man suddenly finds himself in the very depths of sadness

and disenchantment. Everything is petty; everything mean. It is a favorable hour, and God may now speak to the unfettered soul.

If as yet the heart is too sluggish to feel the emptiness of all temporal things, to make it enter into itself and reflect, God in His mercy may send it trials, or afflict it with great reverses.

In the ecclesiastical annals of England we read a curious story of one of these providential humiliations. It was in the reign of Elizabeth, so severe and cruel to Catholics. A young English lord, a lukewarm Catholic, very prominent at court for his brilliant parts, for his cheerful spirits, and for his good looks, was dancing at a court ball, when his foot slipped and he fell, under the very eyes of the queen. Elizabeth by sign and remark showed her disgust for the fellow's awkwardness. This disgrace, of such common occurrence and so trivial, was the beginning of a new life for this youthful and unhappy courtier. Forty-seven years later Thomas Pount, confessor and religious of the Society

of Jesus, died from the effects of a thirty years' imprisonment, having suffered heroically for the faith of Christ. How many religious, going over in mind their past life, have rendered thanks to Providence for just such ill-success or a deception which had caused them to pause and reflect and so let the voice of God, till then unheeded, at length be heard within their hearts!

At times it is the reading of some spiritual book which has given grace its opportunity. The lives of saints, that of Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga especially, have sown the seeds of thousands of vocations. The example of this youthful prince, so pure, so noble and kind, so generous, is the source of a holy contagion to which the most humble are the most susceptible. Well do I remember a veteran soldier who had done service in the cavalry for seven years, and during all this time had lived in absolute indifference to religion. In the engagements near Metz, in which he had taken part, in the very charges which his regiment had made against Prussian cavalry or infantry, he had not,

he was wont to tell me, a single thought of God; not a single fear for his salvation; he thought of nothing save of parrying blows and smiting the enemy. His military service over, he sought a situation. It was the design of Providence that he should engage as servant in a seminary. There one of his fellows, like himself a servant, but with the soul of an apostle, spoke to him of God, and lent him the life of Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga. No doubt his good old mother had said many a prayer at her home in the forest mountain of Ardèche, for the reading of that life was like the rending of a veil. Another and a new horizon met the eye of the old soldier. Some months after, I made his acquaintance as he was beginning to lead the life of the Coadjutor Brothers of the Society of Jesus. He went afterwards to serve the missionaries of the East. There he died a holy death, having devoted eighteen years of his precious life to the service of his Master.¹

¹ Brother Daronat, born at Bosas, in Ardèche, entered the novitiate the 20th of July, 1876, and died piously in the Lord at Caesarea in the mission of Armenia.

God also makes use of the example of good religious to give the first suggestion of a vocation, or the last stimulus to a hesitating and wavering will. It is a fact proved by the experience of all epochs of Christianity that fervent orders recruit themselves and multiply, whilst those whose fervor has cooled remain barren. Who is ignorant of the wonderful fecundity of the organization of Saint Benedict, of that of Saint Dominic, and especially that of Saint Francis of Assisi? After so many centuries past, these great orders yet put forth vigorous branches. The nineteenth century, in spite of the multiplicity of religious congregations and institutes of all kinds, has witnessed similar marvels. To cite only a few examples, the Little Sisters of the Poor, founded about 1840 by a simple curate and two poor girls, have to-day more than three hundred houses in which they gather, feed, and with their own hands care for more than forty thousand old people; the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, founded by Venerable Mother Barat at the beginning of the nineteenth century, are increasing as it were

by miracle. At the death of the foundress, in 1865, they covered with their homes of religious fervor Europe and the two Americas.¹

The Society of Jesus, restored in 1814 by Pius VII, out of the remnant of that noble institute preserved in White Russia, spread with prodigious rapidity, in spite of furious persecutions. Banished from Russia in 1815; from Spain in 1835 and in 1868; from the states of Sardinia and from Rome in 1848; dispersed and robbed in the rest of Italy in 1860 and 1870; exiled from Switzerland in 1847; from Germany in 1871; forced in France to abandon their colleges in 1828, then

¹ *Histoire de la Vénérable Mère Barat*, par Mgr. Baunard, Poussielgue.

Striking examples of this growth and fruitfulness of fervent religious bodies are found among the communities laboring in this country. Such, for instance, is that well-known foundation of Blessed Mother Julie Billiart in 1804. The Sisters of Notre Dame, organized exclusively for apostolic teaching, now number thirty-five hundred, educating, in over one hundred and fifty convents, about one hundred and fifty thousand pupils throughout Belgium, England, Scotland, Africa, and America. These Sisters came to America in 1840 and now have in this country over fifty establishments between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and about thirty-five thousand pupils. (Translator's note.)

dispersed in 1830, 1848, 1880; finally smitten, in common with other religious congregations, in 1901, the Jesuits have multiplied in the midst of their trials. They did not number 3,000 in 1830; they counted more than 4,000 in 1850; 8,000 in 1870, and to-day more than 15,000—working for the glory of God in nearly every region of the globe.

In this prolific growth good example plays its part. Nothing, indeed, is more suited to touch the heart than a life of devotedness, abnegation, and zeal. Nothing is so encouraging as the sight of the brotherly love which reigns in fervent communities and as the soft, sweet radiance of joy—fruit of purity and peace of heart—which shines on the faces of those who have devoted themselves to God with their whole soul. It is indeed a pleasure to journey on to Heaven in the company of such fellow-travelers.

One of the ways by which the Holy Ghost is wont to lead souls to the religious life is, finally a well-made retreat. To all earnest Christians it is profitable to withdraw some-

times far from the usual allurements of life to think on the great interests of eternity. It is a marvelous way of healing the wounds made by sin. One there learns how to live well in order to know how to die well. The hours of reflection and solitude, when the soul searches for truths and recollects itself in prayer, are very favorable to the action of divine grace; for God, infinitely good and merciful but also infinitely worthy, often waits to speak until we are quite willing to listen. Hence it is no wonder that a retreat should be the time set by our Lord to make known His call; nevertheless it does not usually cause vocations. These religious exercises only make such vocations stand out in fuller light. The vocation already existed, more or less distinctly known, and enveloped by a kind of mist. The exercises of the retreat dissipate the mist, remove the obstacles, and cause false impressions, objections, and worldly prejudices to vanish. In the light of supernatural motives the vocation, till now half obscured, makes its full appearance, becomes definite, and asserts itself.

At length when the "I will" is once spoken in response to the suggestion of God to the soul, the exercitant finds in contemplating the passion of our Lord strength for the struggle that awaits him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A VOCATION.

A vocation is never unaccompanied by sacrifice. It is painful to leave family, friends, and all that one holds dear. The separation, often to the imagination more absolute than it will prove in reality, occasions poignant heart pangs.

Ah! it must be for the sake of Jesus Christ indeed, since in answer to the call one has to bid good-by to the fond dreams of the future, to habits of life already long cherished, to tastes the indulgence in which gave great pleasure, and especially to independence in the disposal of time in work or leisure according to the whim of the moment, to freedom in going and coming at will, and of following at times one's own caprice. To-morrow life will be austere and regular, exacting submission like that of a college boy. There are seasons when it seems even sad and

like death before its time. To follow the divine invitation in spite of all difficulties requires courage. And so man is apt to think that he is making a great offering to God and giving Him a great deal in following a vocation, instead of simply being the recipient.

Vocation to religious life is one of the greatest favors our Lord can grant a soul. He has promised the hundredfold even in this life;¹ and He gives it too. Is, then, the religious life one of comfort? No; it is a life of sacrifice, of mortification, of self-renunciation; a life crucified with Jesus crucified; but it bestows a benefit the absence of which secretly poisons the most exquisite pleasures and the presence of which sweetens and compensates all evils, namely, peace. Not that peace which some imagine, who, comparing their continual agitation with the calm which religious enjoy, sometimes call them happy, because they have neither the cares, nor preoccupations, nor the anxieties caused by rearing a family, the

¹ St. Matt., XIX-29.

management of intricate business affairs, the maintenance of rank, reparation often for the past, and always provision for the future. The peace given by Jesus Christ is not a calm and tranquillity of this selfish sort. No one lives less for self and more for others than a religious. If he has left his family, his love for his relatives has become thereby more perfect and more pure. He makes less, it is true, of the riches, the joys, and the purely earthly happiness of those he loves. But what solicitude has he not for their eternal welfare! Few have an idea of the earnest prayers, the sacrifices, at times heroic, made by religious for the good of their families.

Again, though a religious be freed from anxieties—regarding wealth or for future success—he is none the less engrossed with the interests of Jesus Christ. He feels keenly the outrages committed against the divine Majesty, the vicissitudes of the Church; he fears, he prays, he suffers for the souls to whose salvation his efforts are devoted.

If such be the case, what peace, then, can a religious enjoy? A peace entirely inward;

it makes itself felt in the lowest depths of the soul, in spite of difficulties, temptations, and even interior storms which God sometimes permits. This peace is the result of the testimony which the conscience, under the action of the Holy Ghost, bears the fervent religious, assuring him that he belongs entirely to God, as a child does to its father; that all his acts being in agreement with obedience and with his rules are acceptable to God; that if he be faithful to the grace of vocation, nothing can separate him from Jesus Christ; that he is sure of Heaven, since the Lord's promises, which never fail, are its pledge.¹

Besides this peace, the love of our Lord multiplies our strength tenfold and makes everything easy. So good a thing it is to work and suffer for such a Master!

It must be acknowledged, however, that those whom God calls to this state do not always realize the worth and wealth of the interior graces which the religious life has in store for them. It will take all their generosity, aided by grace, to overcome the re-

¹St. Matt., XIX-29.

pugnances, the doubts, the foolish fears that attack them even up to their last moments.

Would, moreover, that they had to struggle against themselves only! Attacks upon their vocation multiply themselves on every side. Even Christian families put obstacles in their way.

At the time when parental authority was certainly not unrecognized Bourdaloue wrote: “It is a right of natural law and of divine law that he himself should choose his state of life whose duty it will be to bear its burdens and to fulfil its obligations. This principle is incontestable.”¹ It is not questioned in these days. Happily, we are not living at a time when some parents, by a strange abuse of their authority, disposed of their children according to their own fancies, destining one for the Church, another for the army, another for the magistracy; arranging marriages, or forcing their daughters to enter convents, without even so much as consulting their wishes. Everybody knows

¹ Sermon for the first Sunday after the Epiphany, on the duties of parents with regard to the vocation of their children, part first.

to-day that the authority of parents does not extend so far. A youth has the right to direct the course of his own life, and to follow the vocation to which he feels drawn. The authority of parents is solely that of a moderator, who guides by his prudence and counsel. The most intimate and tender ties that unite them to their children, their devotedness and experience, give them the right and lay upon them the obligation to advise their sons and daughters; to reason with them; indeed, to arm themselves, if need be, with all the authority over them they still retain. Parents are the natural guides who at the beginning of a career, henceforth to be independent, point out the dangers of the journey, and indicate the right ways and safe paths. Moreover, they will be still at hand to help again, with unwearying love, those who have made a bad beginning, taken a few false steps and bruised their feet against the wayside stones.

It seems that parents retain their character of authoritative counselor when their child has been called to the religious life.

There is, however, in a supernatural vocation a divine interposition which we must take into account. God is Master. If he confers upon a family the great honor of calling one of their children to His service, is it not a duty to bow before the painful but real favor? A mother and a father who are thoroughly Catholic should turn to God in faithful love and say to Him: “Lord, you ask my child of me. By a prior right he belongs to you. He was yours before being mine. You want him. I will not dispute your claim. The sacrifice is very great; yet grant me grace to make it, if not with joy at least with resignation.”

But then has he truly a vocation? Could he wish to leave us for a hard and severe life if he had not a vocation? But I fear some illusion. Since a wise and prudent confessor to whom he has opened his mind, unburdened his soul, made known his weaknesses, his faults, as well as his inmost aspirations, discerns and approves the divine call, what more should I require?

It is the part of good sense enlightened

by faith thus to speak. But that too natural tenderness which makes parents love their children more out of self love than for their own sakes renews the charge, and with the "logic of passion" so disconcerting to reason invents a thousand new pretexts.

Some families are so austere as to refuse to believe in the vocations of their children because they still observe in them outbursts of temper or signs of levity and of love of pleasure. They act as though they thought the call of our Lord, when heard, must at once transform those who follow it as by a stroke of a magic wand; or if upon resolving to become a religious, by this fact alone, one was thereby straightway made perfect. Vocation gives aim and impetus to one's spiritual life, nothing more. The novice will have to make many efforts to correct his faults and to subdue his passions. The whole noviceship will not be long enough, for holiness is not the work of a few days. It is the result of time, of struggle, and of patience.

Other parents again, less Christian in

spirit, pretend that before engaging in the religious state one should know the world, and they make every effort to give that experience to the youth whom God is calling. The world has some very repulsive phases. These they take great care to hide. The world is a life of luxury and of pleasure; it consists of theater going, public merry-making, evening parties, and everything opposed to the Christian spirit. When Saint Thomas Aquinas—who was afterwards to become the most illustrious doctor of the Middle Ages—was journeying as a novice from Naples to Paris, his brothers, who were not reconciled to his vocation, carried him away forcibly and imprisoned him in one of their castles and introduced into his chamber a woman of bad repute. The saintly youth was obliged to arm himself with a burning fagot to defend his virtue. This was their brutal way of making Saint Thomas know the world.

Such methods would to-day excite horror; the very idea of them would not be tolerated. Yet, to consider the matter more closely,

what is meant by making the world known to a youth whom God is calling to His service, if not, unconsciously perhaps, but none the less really, to bring against the noble and magnanimous designs inspired by the Holy Ghost all that flatters the senses, arouses the passions, and weakens the will?

Stopping short of such wicked measures, many families insist upon long delays. They would have given their daughters in marriage unhesitatingly, allowed their sons to take service at sea, or to accept a lucrative position in the colonies. But if it is God who asks them, He is met with a refusal, or with hesitation and a request for time to consider the matter. These prolonged delays weaken and unnerve the strongest courage, and ruin the truest vocation. Our Lord deserves a higher esteem for His divine favors.

If He most frequently chooses the early age of youth at which to make His call heard, He does so for some secret purpose and sublime reasons. Of course, our Lord does what He pleases, and His divine grace works

transformations that thwart our human schemes. Of a persecuting Paul, grace makes a great apostle; of a sinful Saint Augustine, it makes a holy bishop. It seeks out Saint Matthew at the tax-gatherer's money tables, and Saint Ignatius upon a field of battle. Nevertheless, this is not the ordinary way of Providence. Generally, and especially for the apostolate, God makes choice of virgin souls not yet sullied by contact with the world. Being pure, they will therefore be all the stronger and braver. They will not have to drag after them troublesome memories of the past, nor bear upon them scars as yet scarcely healed and ever ready to break out afresh. They will be more pliant, too, because habit has not yet entangled them in its meshes, and so they will bear the yoke of the Lord without effort. It is this truth which an old author tried to express under the form of a real or legendary vision:

“A religious appeared after death to a fellow-monk, all resplendent with glory, and calling him forth from his cell, showed him a great number of men clothed in white and

surrounded with light, who with beautiful crosses upon their shoulders were wending their way in procession to Heaven. Then he showed him others, who walked in the same way, but who were yet more brilliant with light than were the first. These held in their hands a cross, but of much greater beauty and richness than those borne in the first procession.

“Afterwards there passed a third procession, but immensely more brilliant and exciting much greater admiration and wonder than those that had gone before. The crosses of these, too, were of surpassing beauty. But unlike the two files of holy souls who had preceded, each carrying his own cross either in his hand or upon his shoulder, these had each an angel to carry his cross before him, that they might proceed with more ease and greater joy.

“Amazed by the vision, the religious sought an explanation from the brother who had shown it to him. Whereupon the saintly visitant explained that the first whom he had seen, carrying the crosses upon their

shoulders, were those who had entered religion at an advanced age; that the second class, who bore their crosses in their hands, were those who had devoted themselves to this life whilst young; and that the third class, who walked with so firm a step, were those who had embraced the religious state and had renounced all the vanities of the world from their tenderest years.”

Did Christian parents realize the value of their children's vocations and what graces flow therefrom, even upon themselves, perhaps they would change their sentiments. How many sad witnesses of their sons' waywardness have bitterly repented the opposition which had brought about the failure of the divine call! How many fathers have recognized upon their death-bed that the un hoped-for graces of conversion and growth in holiness had come to them through a child given to God! How many a mother finding in her child a confidante and consoler in the days of trial has regretted the tears shed at the hour of separation!

Weakness of will is not the only thing to be dreaded in the struggle for a vocation. The mind itself is at times disturbed by the suggestions of the devil or the specious counsel of false advisers. Why become a religious? say they. You will do greater work in the world. Just think of that great engineer, that great manufacturer, that land-owner, lawyer, physician, or such and such a public officer; what an influence do they not exercise in society! No religious wields so great a power for good. That a man in the world can do much good for God, that some, whose names we might give, do more good than this or that religious, there can certainly be no doubt. But this is not the question; God has not called them and He has called you. Each man has his own peculiar vocation.¹ And what can be said with certainty is that he who lacks the courage

¹Of set purpose have we avoided speaking in this booklet about the secular priesthood, the noble and exalted vocation to which, because of the qualities required by that state, is very special indeed. There is a vocation to the secular clergy and one to the religious life. These vocations are so distinct, the one from the other, that a secular priest may be and often is called to embrace the religious life.

to follow the call of our Lord will do nothing great for His service in the world. In that state upon which he enters from mere whim, in contempt of the merciful designs of Providence, he will not have the grace of that holiness which God was intending for him. Moreover, according to the most explicit teaching of the Church, we may assert that the religious life is a more perfect state than life in the world. Besides, taken as a body, it cannot be gainsaid that religious lead a life more holy, more useful to souls, and giving more glory to God than ordinary Christians do. Finally from the point of view of the defense, welfare, and propagation of the Church, we must consider how much greater influence works that are organized, stable, and assured of future permanence exercise than do isolated efforts. A sharpshooter single-handed may sometimes perform deeds of prowess, but he will never win a battle. To defend the boundaries of the country disciplined troops are needed, well commanded, opposing to the enemy their deeply serried forces.

A certain thought, no doubt, has more than once presented itself to our readers. The religious in France are dispersed or in exile; the convents are or are threatened with being closed; the common talk is of expulsion; of secularization; the police are in pursuit of such as are suspected of leading community life. In these stormy days is it well advised to come forth and speak to us of religious vocation? But remember that every nation in which Catholicity is still full of life bears, as it were by necessity, the germ of religious life. My confidence in my country's religion is too strong to let me think that fetters and spoliations inflicted by law will suffice to check the soaring flight of Christian life and its full expansion in the practice of the evangelical counsels. Catholicity strikes its roots deeply into the strata of our old French families. In spite of the wreckage that strews the ground after a day of violent storm, it will spring forth again steadier and more full of life than before. Even in the midst of the tempest France needs good and holy religious. To unbridled im-

piety ought she not to oppose the prayers, the adorations, the austerities of contemplative communities? In the balance of God's justice in counterpoise to a nation's crimes nothing can so effectively turn the scales as voluntary immolation and entire oblation of self.

Abroad, the flourishing French missions,¹ which constitute the purest glory of our land, demand to-day, as in the past, under pain of failure, the help of fresh workmen. They, according to the mysterious laws of compensation ordained by Divine Providence, will heap up merit for this country.

Finally, shoulder to shoulder with the secular clergy in France,² the religious have an immense task to perform, that, namely, of bringing back to Christ, by holiness of life,

¹The general interests of the apostolate and its principal power in all parts of the world are represented chiefly by the French congregations. (Letter of Leo XIII to Cardinal Richard, December 20, 1900.) Cf. Fr. Rouvier, "Loin du Pays" in 80, Retaux; J. B. Piolet; "Les Missions Catholiques Françaises," 6 in 80, Colin.

²The religious orders are the necessary auxiliaries of the clergy, in the exercise of the holy ministry and in the function of Catholic education. (Letter of Leo XIII to Cardinal Richard, December 20, 1900.)

by devotedness, by charity, the unenlightened, indifferent, and impious millions, the ever rising tide of whom threatens to flood the whole country.

It is, therefore, because I do not despair of the faith of my country, because I long for God to raise up for it apostles and saviors, that I have written these few pages. May they serve to enlighten some of those whom God is calling, and with the grace of God give them the courage to go, even into exile, and there seek the *crib* of their religious life.

May they, at least, make their readers better understand by what motives and attractions of grace God is wont to lead chosen souls on to His purpose.

The study of these mysterious ways, if that were all, will well repay their efforts and consideration.

It has seemed good to the translator not to avail himself of the author's kind permission to alter at will the final paragraphs of this booklet and by a more practical conclusion, suited to the Church's greater freedom in

America, to replace his eloquent ending, in the compressed and energetic lines of which he seems to have tried to express all the ardent religious love of Country and Church and of their supernatural destiny and glory that fills his pious and far-seeing soul.

American boys and girls, or those of any English-speaking country, will be clever enough to draw the inference that if in such troubled times and under the difficulties that dear old France—once the godmother of so many peoples—now opposes to the growth of the religious spirit and its highest expression—the religious state—the Church can, should, and does foster vocations to the permanent and organized practice of the Gospel Counsels, how much more are we bound to cultivate, cherish, and strengthen these divine energies when they manifest themselves in our own clime, where religious freedom in thought and deed, in personal conscience and public expression, is by constitutional right secured to the individual and to society. With this view, and to this purpose, does the translator offer to our youth

the unpretentious version of this booklet. For to him it is a strong "a fortiori" argument, which the devout and sharp minds of our college boys and convent girls will not let pass, but will express in unanswerable logic, "With greater reason in our free land must we spend our life's energies, Heaven born, working under the shadow of the cross, with hearts and minds quickened and taught by Thy grace and counsels, O Lord,

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